



MAKING THE MOST OF THE MEDIA

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To disseminate policy-relevant messages based on APRA research at country and regional levels, the Information and Communication and Engagement (ICE)¹ team encouraged country teams to build relationships with the media from early on in the programme. This is not something with which APRA researchers had much experience and, subsequently, the approach was taken up by only a few teams. Nevertheless, with support from the ICE team, those teams that pursued active engagement with the media proved very successful.

What did APRA do?

The APRA Malawi team was the first to hold a media event in September 2019 – and, thanks to its success, this communication and engagement approach was highlighted at **APRA's annual review meeting** in Kenya in December 2019 as an example to the other teams. The Malawi team shared that, as a result of the event, a WhatsApp group with the journalists was set up and they planned to share updates on publications and events. Various media houses were also invited to the **final national stakeholder workshop** at the end of November 2021, but no further events specifically targeted at the media were held by the APRA Malawi team.

The Tanzania team followed Malawi's lead by holding a specific **one-day media event** in October 2020. The media were also specifically invited to attend the Tanzania **national engagement event** in October 2021; the outcomes of which are reported below.

In Ghana, the teams specifically invited media to their engagement events. This included a **dissemination workshop** of Work Stream (WS) 1 research findings on oil palm commercialisation held in March 2021 and cocoa in Ghana in August 2021, as well as the Ghana

WS1 and WS2 combined **national stakeholder event** held in November 2021.

Finally, the Nigeria WS1 team also invited media representatives to community-level stakeholder engagement workshops in **Kaduna** and **Ogun** states in November 2021.

Elsewhere, the ICE team worked with a Nairobi-based correspondent, Bob Koigi, who has an excellent pan-Africa media network, to distribute APRA articles from the final APRA e-Dialogue series. This resulted in an impressive number of articles being published.²

The ICE team also worked with Bob to organise and host a virtual media briefing climate webinar on 29 October 2021, comprising APRA researchers from Tanzania and Zimbabwe working on climate research, ahead of COP26 in Glasgow. The event was accompanied by a media advisory and moderated by Kofi Adu Domfeh, an award-winning Ghanaian climate journalist.

What worked well?

The Malawi team's one-day event in September 2019 resulted in a number of articles and radio broadcasts focusing on the potential importance of groundnuts as a commercial and export crop. An **Agribusiness Policy Brief** focusing on Malawi was also picked up by the **Nation** newspaper in September 2020. The team's COVID-19 Country Reports, highlighting the impacts on food systems and livelihoods, were also well reported by the national media in **October 2020** and February 2021.

In November 2020, APRA researcher and member of the Economics Association of Malawi, Dr Jacob Mazalale, hosted a live radio and television dialogue

Table 1 Main Malawi press coverage

Media report	Link/content
<i>The Marabi Post</i> , 1/9/19	Research into groundnuts' viability as Malawi's forex earner underway
<i>Nyasatimes</i> , 2/9/19	Malawi research into groundnuts' viability as Malawi's forex earner underway
<i>Malawi Broadcasting Corporation</i> , 13/9/19	Researchers seek to revive groundnuts as MW's leading export crop
<i>The Nation</i> , 22/9/20	Front – "Think-tank tips MW on agro-investment", and inside – "Malawi urged to streamline business incentives"
<i>The Nation</i> , 4/2/21	Research exposes Covid-19 info gap
<i>The Sunday Times</i> , 7/2/21	COVID-19 front page lead story
<i>Sunday Times</i> , 14/11/21	Extended Opinion Piece by APRA researcher, Blessings Chissinga – "Talking Political Economy – Re-thinking Malawi's Development"

Source: Authors' own

1 The ICE team is made up of members of **WRENmedia** staff, including its Director.

2 Reeve, S., Cartmell, S., Mutimer, A. and Frost, O. (2022) *e-Dialogues Spark Debate on the Dynamics of Agricultural Commercialisation*. APRA ICE Insight 4. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium. DOI: [10.19088/APRA.2022.029](https://doi.org/10.19088/APRA.2022.029).

programme. Focusing on poverty reduction and economic growth, the live debate took place on Times Radio and Television, a leading media house in Malawi, and was also livestreamed over Facebook.

In Tanzania, the APRA country team's decision to hold a one-day event in October 2020, specifically for print, radio and TV journalists, resulted in an impressive 65 media outputs – with coverage in seven Swahili language newspapers, five English language newspapers, four TV/video channels, five multi-media channels, and 11 different blog channels. As Whiteside (2022)³ stated: *'This demonstrates extensive coverage of a range of issues covered by APRA research in Tanzania that goes well beyond a narrow group of specialists. In a small and difficult-to-quantify way, the quality of agricultural coverage in the media improved and the role of research evidence in the national discourse increased.'* Further extensive coverage was obtained after inviting the media to their national stakeholder event in October 2021.

In Ghana, the APRA team specifically invited the media to the oil palm research dissemination workshop, which resulted in good coverage across radio stations, online news sites and newspapers. The articles and coverage included information on workshop discussions regarding, for instance, calls to form an **Oil Palm Board** – similar to Cocobod, the Ghana Cocoa Board – to effectively govern and handle challenges confronting the sector.

Similarly, APRA-convened workshops on the cocoa sector in Ghana resulted in coverage of the APRA team's identification of the **high cost of inputs** and the need for **innovative, sustainable micro-credit support services to cocoa farmers**.

The Nigeria community-level stakeholder engagement workshops, held in Kaduna and Ogun states in November 2021, provided an important and successful opportunity for media engagement. The key messages from these workshops received extensive coverage in 10 different national and local newspapers.⁴

From APRA researchers' points of view, when asked how they would rate the value of working with the media, 50% of the 22 respondents (11) ranked this as 4 out of 5 (with 5 being 'most important' and 1 being 'least important'), and a further eight (36%) ranked it as 5. Three ranked it as only 3 out of 5.

Where APRA researchers interacted well with the media and were able to see the evidence of this approach, feedback was very positive. *'The exclusive forum we had for media was useful for them to pick interest and follow up on APRA activities,'* stated Aida Isinka, APRA Tanzania country lead. Ntengua Mdoe of APRA Tanzania, concurred that engaging with the media *'increased APRA's visibility'*, while *'encouragement to use a number of media helped to publicise APRA works,'* observed Devotha Kilave, APRA Tanzania researcher.

The Ghana team also confirmed that providing information to journalists and, more specifically, inviting them to attend events, worked well. *'Multiple platforms for media engagements, such as online news portals, radio, print media, as well as radio and television stations, among others, have been useful,'* stated Louis Hodey, APRA Ghana researcher. Fred Dzanku, APRA Ghana country lead, reinforced that point, commenting, *'The push (from ICE) to engage the media made it happen.'*

Working with Nairobi-based correspondent Bob Koigi strengthened the media coverage of APRA in the closing months of the programme. The ICE team would have been unable to achieve the same level of coverage without tapping into his network. Furthermore, Busani Bufana, a Zimbabwe-based science and agriculture correspondent, who works regularly with WRENmedia (the ICE team lead) and attended the APRA climate webinar, successfully managed to publish an **article** in the Cornell University Alliance for Science platform.

Andy Newsham, Toendepi Shonhe and Tsitsi Bvute also succeeded in getting an article on their climate research on tobacco in Zimbabwe published in **The Conversation**, which achieved over 5,000 views in October 2021 alone.

What could be improved?

Media engagement efforts were not taken up by all teams and, despite early efforts from Malawi, the team acknowledged that they should have continued the momentum. *'Consistent engagement was missing. We waited too long to get results and to begin interacting with media,'* reflected Mirriam Matita, APRA Malawi co-country lead. However, she also commented that, *'hype on research work was short-lived and some journalists, despite engagement, never submitted any output in the media outlets.'*

3 Whiteside, M. (2022) *African Media Coverage: APRA's Contribution to Understanding of Agricultural Change*. ALRE Working Paper 3. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium. <https://doi.org/10.19088/APRA.2022.018>.

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Dawit Alemu, APRA Ethiopia country lead, also stated that, *'We, as the Ethiopia APRA team, were weak in using and engaging with the media, but also in communicating the media coverage we did achieve to the ICE team.'* It should be noted that Ethiopia is a more challenging environment in which to work with the media, as print outlets are State controlled.

Understanding of issues can also be challenging for the media, and this was highlighted by Kojo Amanor of the Ghana team: *'Media often had a poor grasp of issues or seized onto their own interests, which were not necessarily the central message.'* This challenge and perception of the media is common amongst researchers and can constrain efforts to engage with journalists, particularly if they do not have particular expertise or experience of the topics being discussed.

A request for further training and media and engagement support was expressed by a number of APRA researchers, whilst others requested additional assistance in *'writing stories for the media for non-academic popular readers.'*

Others conceded that more efforts could have been made right from the start of the APRA programme. *'Establishing relevant networks and continuous engagements with traditional media would prove useful in the future.'*

Key lessons

Consistent efforts to engage with the media pays dividends: Where teams engaged with print and broadcast journalists and specifically invited them to APRA events, this resulted in extensive media coverage. Holding a dedicated event for journalists allows an opportunity for them to learn, ask questions, and take time to read material provided, and is more

likely to result in future interest/engagement. However, these efforts/networks should be established from the start of a research programme and not left until towards the end. Building networks and trust between researchers and the media takes time and is an investment worth making.

Additional support to research teams on media engagement improves understanding: A revealing comment from one APRA researcher noted that, *'Country research teams should be funded to organise at least one media outreach programme each year to interact with media houses and enlighten them on how they could help to influence policy by working with APRA.'* Such an outreach programme could include organising a media field visit to really enable journalists to understand the research and get an insight into farming livelihoods and agricultural commercialisation. Efforts like these take time and investment to organise effectively but, again, reap rewards in terms of building media capacity and strengthening researcher/media understanding and networking.

Investing in media training for researchers builds confidence: Providing specific training on how to engage effectively with the media and how to write/provide good, clear key messages for outlets would also enhance researcher confidence and lead to enhanced engagement and media coverage.

Engaging with media networks creates a multiplier effect: Working with African correspondents and tapping into African media networks significantly increases coverage achieved – and is more relevant than making efforts to only publish in the UK (e.g., *The Guardian*) and international publications, which is extremely challenging. Researchers should also leverage on links with publications, e.g., *The Conversation*, where these exist.

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